

TURK CHARACTER IN THE LEGENDARY ALBANIAN SONGS NAMED THE SONGS OF THE FRONTIER WARRIORS*

Sınır Savaşçılarınin Türküleri Adlı Efsanevi Arnavut Türkülerinde Türk Karakteri

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ABSTRACT

For a long period of time, the Balkan Peninsula had marked the border between the Ottoman and the Austro-Hungarian empires. The existence of the border at this point meant that in the Balkans there was a part of the population that was under Austro-Hungary and was part of it, but there was also a part of the population that was under the Ottoman Empire and that was part of it. As a result, not only do we find the Turk individual as a character being mentioned in most of the cultures co-existing in the Balkan Peninsula at the time but within a very limited environment we find the latter being presented somewhere as a positive character and somewhere as a negative character. The Songs of the Frontier Warriors is a tremendous literary compilation of Albanian epic songs in which is presented the conflict between the Albanians and the Slavic invaders coming from the north of the country. These songs depict the conflicts that had been brought into the forefront of the relations between the two nations at the border, the wars between them, the imprisonment of one another, property appropriations and kidnapping of girls, etc. In a great number of such songs, one comes across the Turk as a character. We have analyzed the Turk as a character as mentioned in twenty-five of such songs and in all of them the Turk is presented as a positive character, who helps locals, defends their lands from foreign invaders, protects the locals as well as their families and properties, etc. While researching the characteristics of this character in such songs, we have come to underline the fact that there are certain aspects and descriptions of his that are clear and some of which are less clear and ambiguous: the Turk on one hand, is clearly depicted as far as his appearance and personality traits are concerned; however, what is deemed as ambiguous in its description is whether by the name Turk such songs had referred to the ethnic Turk or the notion of it belongs to a much broader understanding of what a 'Turk' is in that it includes all of the population living in the Ottoman Empire. When it comes to its demographics, the Ottoman Empire was a very complex and diverse community reflected by its great number of nations belonging to different religious denominations and speaking different languages living within its borders. This complex demographical diversity only adds to the ambiguity of the name 'Turk' as in such songs the latter has not only been used to refer to the Albanian Muslim population, or to the Muslim population in particular but even the people living within the Ottoman Empire's borders in general. The change highlighted in terms of the status of the character labeled as a 'Turk' in different settings and contexts in Albanian epic songs known as the 'The Songs of the Frontier Warriors' goes to show that the 'Turk' as a character in Albanian folklore is a complex one in that one sees it play a variety of functions making it a very flexible and fluid character in legendary Albanian songs.

Keywords

Turk, The Songs of the Frontier Warriors, Ottoman Empire, Slavs, Magyars.

ÖZ

Balkanlar uzun zamandır Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ile Avusturya-Macaristan İmparatorluğu arasındaki sınır olmuştur. Bu noktada sınırın varlığı, Balkanlar'da nüfusun bir kısmının Avusturya-Macaristan'a bağlı ve onun bir parçası olduğu anlamına geliyordu, ancak nüfusun bir kısmı da Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'na bağlıydı. Türk karakteri eylemleriyle, bu türkülerin fikirlerini ve motiflerini, ya da önemli sanatsal olayları ve durumları vb. oluşturur kişidir. Bu arada Türk'ü sadece Balkan halklarının kültürlerinde bir karakter olarak değil, küçük bir çevrede onu farklı, bir yerde olumlu, bir yerde olumsuz bir karakter olarak görüyoruz. Kreshnik türkülerini, ülkenin kuzeyinden gelen Arnavutlar ile Slav işgalciler arasındaki çatışmanın sunulduğu efsanevi Arnavut türkülerden oluşan büyük bir gruptur. Bu türkülerin yirmi beşinde Türk'ü bir karakter olarak inceledik ve tüm bu türkülede Türk, yerlilere yardım eden, ülkesini işgalcilerden koruyan, yerlilerin ve ailelerinin servetini koruyan vb. olumlu karakterdir. Bu yazıda, türkülerin yirmi beşinde Türk'ü bir karakter olarak inceledik ve tüm bu şarkılarda Türk karakteri, yerlilere yardım eden, ülkesini işgalcilerden koruyan, yerlilerin ve ailelerinin servetini koruyan vb. olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Bu türkülerde bu karakterin özelliklerini araştırırken, bazı

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kısımlarının net olduğunu ancak bazı kısımlarının net olmadığını fark ettik. Türk, görünüş ve karakter özellikleri açısından net bir şekilde tasvir edilmiştir. Olumlu bir karakter olarak Türk hakkında yeterince açık olmayan şey, bu şarkılarda etnik bir Türk'ün adının bir Türk olduğu veya Türk adının daha geniş bir kavram olduğu ve Osmanlı İmparatorluğu altındaki tüm nüfusu kastettiği anlaşılmamaktadır. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu nüfus bakımından karmaşıktı, içinde birçok millet, dil, ve dini inanç vardı Bu imparatorluğun nüfusunun bu çeşitliliği, Türk adının belirsizliğine rağmen, bu türlerde genellikle Türk ile Arnavut Müslüman nüfusun işaretlendiğini görmekteyiz. Osmanlı, tüm milletlerden, dillerden ve dinlerden. Kreşniklerin türükleri olarak bilinen efsanevi Arnavut türüklerinin farklı durum ve bağlamları üzerinden Türk isimli karakterin statülerinin değişmesi, Türk'ün Arnavut folklorunda karmaşık bir karakter olduğunu, Türk kültüründe birden fazla işlevle bulunduğunu göstermektedir. Bu kültür, efsanevi Arnavut türüklerinde Türk karakterini oldukça esnek hale getiriyor. Türk'ün bir Müslüman rolüyle mi yoksa Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun genel adamı rolüyle mi ortaya çıktığı, büyük ölçüde Türk karakterinin bulunduğu türkün bağlamına bağlıdır, bu nedenle Kreşniklerin her şarkısı ayrıntılı bilgi gerektirir. Ancak Türk karakteri hangi işlevi görürse görsün Kreşnik türüklerinin önemli bir parçasıdır, bu nedenle Türk karakterini anlamadan bu şarkıların olaylarını, zamanlarını ve Osmanlı'nın sınırını anlayamayız. İmparatorluk ve Slavların ve Macarların kuzeyden istilası vb. Türk karakter, Kreşnik türüklerinin bu bölümlerinin çoğuna anlam kazandırmayı başaran belirli bir karakterdir, bu nedenle başka karakterlerle değiştirilemez, onun yerine başka bir karakter getirilmesi onları çok belirsiz ve bu şarkıların gizemli bileşenlerini bırakacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Türk, Sınır Savaşçılarının Türükleri, Osmanlı İmparatorluğu, Slavlar, Macarlar.

Introduction

Songs of the Frontier Warriors are songs that have taken up their name from the conflicts unfolding at the Albanian-Slavic border between the two nations. The two nations represented two completely different cultures and the differences between them were made evident mostly at the frontier separating the Albanians from the Slavs. The conflict between these two nations originated from the invasive tendencies displayed by the Slavs toward Albanian lands: during the time when the Ottoman Empire was weakened, the Slavs submitted themselves to take advantage of it by looking to invade as many Albanian territories as possible. In doing so, the Slavs not only occupied Albanian-held territories, they also destroyed and burned everything that crossed their path, killing a great number of the population living near the border, taking them hostage, etc. In this conflict, we see the great Albanian heroes fervently fighting to protect their lands, and family and helping the ones who had suffered most from the Slavs get back on their feet. The Songs of the Frontier Warriors emerged as a way to immortalize the heroism displayed by the people living in such parts of the country in their ever-lasting fight against the Slavs. The 'Turk' character in such songs is depicted as a positive character who by guarding the realm of the Ottoman Empire, contributes to guarding the Albanian-held lands from the Slavic invasions, guards the properties of the Albanian people, safely keeps their families, etc. But, the label 'Turk' is often attributed to the Albanian border population and as such implies the Albanian population that at the time was under Ottoman rule and does not refer to ethnic Turks or any other population that was ethnically Turk. The Songs of the Frontier Warriors encompasses a great number of songs dealing with the fate of frontier warriors, nonetheless, we have only chosen the songs where the 'Turk' character is mentioned to analyze the characteristics that this character displays in these songs.

Balkan countries were parts of the Ottoman Empire for almost five centuries. During this time, the 'Turk' as the symbol of such an empire, makes its way into the culture, history, folklore, etc. of these nations. The Turk character presents itself in the folklore of the Balkan nations in different shapes and forms, as a positive character and as a negative one as well. In the folklore of some of the Balkan nations such as the Croats (Jezernik 2017: 35), Serbians (Šuica 2017: 291), Slovenians (Bartulovic 2017: 203),

Polish (Niewiara 2017: 217), etc. the ‘Turk’ displays traits of a negative character. Whereas, in the Albanian epic songs known as the Songs of the Frontier Warriors, the ‘Turk’ comes across as a positive character.

Turk character in the Songs of Frontier Warriors

1. Historical records about the Turk character in the Songs of Frontier Warriors

The main protagonists of the Songs of the Frontier Warriors are the 30 Agallars of Jutbina and Klladuesha. These Agallars are the upper class of Albanian society who fight against the foreign invaders in their country and are led by the two brothers, Muja and Halili. A great number of the Agallars of Jutbina and Klladuesha are mentioned by name: Muj (short for Mustafë), Halili, Omeri, Osmani, Ali Bajraktari, etc. These characters in the Songs of the Frontier Warriors are not only mentioned by name but are also referred to as ‘Turks’. But are these characters actually ‘Turks’? What do the historical records show about the 30 Agallars of Jutbina and Klladusha that would help us in determining the type of ‘Turks’ these songs speak about?

The first clue given in terms of these characters who not only go by their first name but are often referred to as ‘Turks’, is that they live near the Ottoman Empire border, but as such they are not deemed as warriors guarding the frontier of the Empire, they are commoners who live in the border villages of the latter. Living near the border, it is incumbent upon them to have their enemies near, and they are often susceptible to being attacked by Slavs, Magyars, etc. who cross the border into their lands, destroy their property, kill their families, take them hostage, etc. Hence, the wars carried out by the 30 Agallars are wars that are carried out in self-defense, with the purpose of protecting their homes and their families. The Frontier Warriors as such as are not soldiers guarding the border, they do not have military organization but quite the contrary. Their organization is the sporadic organization of a certain squad that fights to protect themselves from the invaders.

If we base our claims on the existing historical data on the people living near the border separating the Ottoman and the Austro-Hungarian empires, we come to a very interesting conclusion on the name ‘Turk’ which these characters were identified with. The existing historical records show that on the border separating the two Empires, there were many different nationalities co-existing with the Turks such as Albanians, Bosnians, etc. (Sejko 2002: 162) meaning that the population living near the border consisted of communities belonging to different nationalities affiliations but that was predominantly Muslim. When such characters which make up for the heroes depicted in the Songs of the Frontier Warriors are referred to as Turks, we understand that the term ‘Turk’ was used to refer not only to individuals or communities who were ethnically Turks but also to refer to people of the Ottoman Empire with Islamic culture and religion living within the borders of this Empire. In fact, this information provides important evidence for the ‘Turk’ name: we understand that the Songs of the Frontier Warriors preserve as relics the memory of an early period of the Ottoman Empire where the word ‘Turk’ was used to identify all of the different nations living within the Ottoman borders regardless of the language they spoke or ethnic identity. Therefore, the Songs of the Frontier Warriors do not reflect the last phase of the Ottoman Empire when nationalisms were created within this Empire and each people did not call itself a Turk but called themselves based on their nationality. The Songs of the Frontier Warriors preserve the memory of an early stage when the word Turk was used to identify each member of all the nationalities living within the borders of the empire. This is also said

by various scholars (Jezernik 2010: 46) and travelers in the Balkan Peninsula, one of whom is Edith Durham, who in her work "The burden of the Balkans" explains that the Turk name in the Balkans is called Muslims and not ethnic Turks, she says: "Turk, it cannot be emphasized enough, means in the Balkan Peninsula Muslim, and has nothing to do with race." (1905: 203)

2. The Turk as a protagonist

From the Songs of the Frontier Warriors, we have analyzed twenty-three songs in which the character of the Turk is mentioned. The songs in hand are named as following: "Halili kills Gavran Kaptain and takes Dylber Angjelinen for his wife" (Songs of the Frontier Warriors III 1993: 53), "Ali Bajraktari takes Fatime of Pash Vidim for his wife" (Songs of the Frontier Warriors I 1974: 66) "Halili takes Dylbere of Taliri's Krajl for his wife" (Songs of the Frontier Warriors I 1974: 111), "Ban of Zadar asks for Ajkuna's hand in marriage" (Songs of the Frontier Warriors I 1974: 94), "Poor Ali's marriage" (Songs of the Frontier Warriors I 1974: 122), "Milosh Grebeni surrounds Deli Rizvanolli" (Songs of the Frontier Warriors III 1993: 61), "The seven kings complain in Istanbul" (Songs of the Frontier Warriors III 1993: 245), "Gjergj Elez Alija wounds Senjane Ivani" (Songs of the Frontier Warriors III 1993: 23), "Gjyliqe Brahimi" (Songs of the Frontier Warriors III 1993: 148), "Starve Kapidoni kidnaps Muje and Halili's sister" (Songs of the Frontier Warriors III 1993: 128), "Muja saves Tala" (Songs of the Frontier Warriors III 1974: 48), "Bani Zadrani" (Songs of the Frontier Warriors II 1991: 123), "The kidnapping of Muji's wife" (National treasures II 1937: 159), "Halili's death" (National treasures II 1937: 227), "Muji and Jervenija" (National treasures II 1937: 170), "Ali Bajraktari (Besa)" (National treasures II 1937: 108), "Ali Aga junior" (National treasures II 1937: 136), "Halili takes the white Begzade" (Songs of the Frontier Warriors I 1974: 16), "Ugiçe Hyseni takes the Krajl of Kotorr's Dylbere" (Songs of the Frontier Warriors I 1974: 156), "The Hajkuna's escape" (Songs of the Frontier Warriors I 1974: 99), "Muja kill Bajloz of Black Sea" (Songs of the Frontier Warriors II 1991: 3), "Halil and Paun Harambash" (Songs of the Frontier Warriors II 1991: 15), "Muja is taken prisoner" (Neziri 2009: 25), "Halil's marriage (Neziri 2011: 55), "Old aunt" (Albanian folk songs of Kosovo-Metohija I 1952: 95). Through analyzing the songs listed, we have come to the conclusion that the character of the Turk as depicted in the 'Songs of the Frontier Warriors' displays the following common traits: a) The Turk character in these songs does not refer to the ethnic Turk but it refers to any member of the Ottoman Empire; b) The Turk character symbolizes the Muslim character; c) The Turk personifies the positive character who fights to defend the country from the Slavic invasion, protects the people and ensures their wellbeing; d) the Turk character is the opposite of what an antagonist would be deemed as, he does not destroy or kill like an antagonist would, he does not take people hostage; e) in certain situations, the Turk refers to each and every individual living under the Ottoman Empire rule and within its borders regardless of his or her religious beliefs or ethnicity.

In the 'Songs of the Frontier Warriors', there is always an antagonist going against the 'Turk' which is a Slav or a Magyar. The antagonists depicted in these songs are very different from the Turk characters: they are not Turks as they are either Slavs or Magyars; they are not part of the Ottoman Empire as they live outside of its borders; they are Catholic; their names are Catholic such as Mihajl, Ivan, and Jovan, etc. The great differences from the Turks prove that the antagonists of the Songs of the Frontier Warriors belong to a completely different population.

The names of the characters mentioned in these songs are also an important cornerstone in the difference between them, both culturally and nationally, so characters called Turk are characters with positive characters, while characters with Slavic or Magyar names are characters with negative characters who commit illegal acts. This rule is known to apply up until the case of the two brothers who find themselves listed in these two different categories: one is the negative character, he has a Catholic name, Siran, and his cause is that of invading the Albanian-held lands, whereas his brother being a positive character, has a Muslim name, Osman (Shala 1972: 127), his cause is the protection of the lands and people, etc. This shows that the Turk character has a good image in the legendary Albanian songs, in fact, he is the hero of such songs. On the other hand, we see the Turk label be attached only to characters fitting the abovementioned descriptions i.e. the ones bearing Muslim names, fighting to protect themselves and their families, properties, and country from foreign invaders, etc.

While the name 'Turk' gives identity to the characters of the Songs of the Frontier Warriors, the identity of the positive character, Muslim, etc., the characters of these songs are sometimes called based on their first names and sometimes called 'Turk'. In the song named 'Halili Kills Gavran Kapetan and Takes Dylber Angelina' the main character is sometimes referred to as Mujë (short for Mustafë) whereas in the following verse he is referred to as a 'Turk':

Praying, Muja had been.

Quickly salam, the Turk had given. (Songs of the Frontier Warriors III 1993: 54)

We notice the same description unfold with the antagonists in the songs as well. They are not only referred to by their first names but they are also depicted with epithets as Slavs, Magyars, crudes, etc., labels which are used to denote the negative light in which these characters are depicted in these songs.

In the song "Ali Bajraktari takes Fatime of Pash Vidim for his wife" we see the figure of the Muslim woman saved by Ali, the Turk character. The conflict among the Turks, Slavs, Magyars, etc. in the 'Songs of the Frontier Warriors' is often initiated by women, one of these cases is also this song. Mihajli, the antagonist of this song, a brave man, forces the beautiful Muslim girl to marry him and not a member of her Turk community:

Mihajl Magyar was there

nine years had since he had sent the word to her

"She never will dare to marry a Turk!" (Songs of the Frontier Warriors I 1974: 67)

The honor of this Muslim girl is defended by a Turk hero named Ali. She can only be saved by a strong, powerful, brave man who matches the great strength of the antagonist Mihajl, and who is willing to fight him on equal ground. Because of this, the girls tell Pasha's daughter that if she is not saved by Turk Ali, there is no hope that she will be saved by anyone else, and as a result, she will remain a 'serf' in Hungary.

all the girls have seen Ali

and they have told Pasha's daughter:

If this Turk does not protect you,

Mihajl, poor you, wants to take you

-you will become a 'serf' in Hungary. (Songs of the Frontier Warriors I 1974: 67)

From this passage, we understand that the Turk character in Albanian epic songs is depicted as a brave, powerful man who uses his strength not to endanger, kill, or destroy others as his antagonist Mihaj does, but quite the contrary, the Turk uses his power to keep the people in his community safe and sound.

In the ‘Songs of the Frontier Warriors’, we encounter numerous cases when Slavic and Hungarian girls convert themselves to Islam. They call on Turk heroes to save them and take them to the Ottoman Empire because they do not want to live in their Catholic communities anymore and they do not see themselves getting married within their own communities. What is important in these cases for the Turk name is that these characters show the conversion to Islam by saying "I became Turks", meaning that the Turk name represents the whole Islamic religion in these cases. Such a case is noted in the song “Halili takes Dylbere of the Krajl’s Talir for his wife”. At the beginning of this song, the girl who converts herself to Islam (or a “Turk”) sends a letter to Halil, the hero of the songs, in which he informs him that she intends to convert herself to Islam/Turk and she wants to marry a Muslim man named Halil, urging him to save her and her honor from the Catholic community she lives in:

“How are you says Sokole Halili,

(...)

I have been a Turk for a year,,

I have celebrated Little Eid.” (Songs of the Frontier Warriors I 1974: 112)

In such a passage, it becomes evident that the word “Turk” refers to someone who is Muslim. In these cases, the heroes of the Kreshnik songs, called Turks, consider it their duty to preserve the honor of these girls Muslims and therefore take the path to save them, embarking on difficult adventures to help them, in wars of bloody duels with the Catholic circle of girls. Because these converted Muslim girls are tortured by their Catholic circle, tortured by their family from the moment they understand that their daughter has become Muslim/Turk, or is in love with a Turk. Here is how the mother reacts in light of the realization that her daughter has fallen in love with a Turk in the song “Muji and Jervenija”:

Her mother was standing nearby

Slapped her daughter across her face

-One must not seek to love a Turk (National Treasures II 1937: 171)

The fact that the name Turk in the ‘Songs of the Frontier Warriors’ refers to a Muslim of the Ottoman Empire is made evident when the latter stands close by a Slav, as happens often in the songs in hand. In these cases, the phrase "Turk and Slavic" means "Muslim and Catholic". During our research on the ‘Songs of the Frontier Warriors’, we have come across such a phenomenon in a number of songs, passages of which we will be quoting and listing in trying to highlight the contrast between the Turk on one hand, and the Slavs on the other. In the song ‘Muja duels Galan Captain’ we underline the following verses:

Look what Zuke Bajraktari said:

For the love of God, oh Mujo Bylykbashi

*is there a **Turk** in Glladushe you are scared of,*

*is there a **Slav** in Seje you are scared of?* (Songs of the Frontier Warriors I 1974: 80)

In the song “Bani of Zadar asks for Ajkuna’s hand in marriage” we have the following verses:

there is this girl I know,

*No **Turk** or **Slav** is like her.* (Songs of the Frontier Warriors I 1974: 95)

Whereas in some songs the contrast between Muslims and Catholics is highlighted using the terms Turk and Kaurr. Among such songs, we have the song “Millosh Grebeni surrounds Deli Rizvanolli”:

in **Turks** and **Kaurs** one will not find any better. (Songs of the Frontier Warriors III 1993: 63)

In the song "The Kidnapping of Muji's Wife" we have the verse:

*Do not feel sorry for **Turks** or **Kaurrs*** (National Treasures II 1937: 161)

In the song "Halili's Death" we have the following verses:

If I had known you were this kind of a man,

(...)

*We together would rule **Turks** and **Kaurs**.* (National Treasures II 1937: 230)

Therefore, in the 'Songs of the Frontier Warriors,' the Turk represents the opposite of Magyars, Slavs, and Kaurs. The Turk character personifies the Muslim individual hence his names are all Muslim names i.e. Halil, Omer, Osman, Ali, etc., whereas the Magyars, Slav, and Kaur characters personify the Catholic individual hence their names are of Catholic origin i.e. Jovan, Mihajl, etc. The 'Songs of the Frontier Warriors' are sometimes prone to underlining the names of the characters themselves, but sometimes it also looks to underline their religious beliefs by calling them Turks or Slavs, Magyars, etc. depending on what religious denomination they belong to. Nonetheless, there are cases when the character is only referred to as a *Turk* without even having a first name as noted in the song "*Gjergj Elez Alija wounds Senjane Ivan*". In this song, the Turk is small, and in being such he is prone to be attacked by his enemies who are deceived by his appearance and fight him to take hold of his wealth:

Ivan looked to intimidate him,

Has blocked the boy's path.

-Stop right there, you little Turk,

give me your horse right now, (Songs of the Frontier Warriors III 1993: 24)

But these characters forget that the Turk is the image of an empire, the Ottoman Empire, and the song has this purpose, to give the superiority of this character over his opponents: the *Turk* character according to this song, regardless of how he looks like or what his size is, he remains the symbol of an entire Empire therefore he is invincible. The Turk defeats any enemy of his and his battles are engraved in history:

I asked him to duel me.

A more dangerous Turk I had never seen-

He came to me hard;

I dared not cross his path.

I escaped by Dunav,

In Dunav the Turk was expecting me,

he hit me with the sword

and cut off my arm (Songs of the Frontier Warriors III 1993: 25)

The advantage of the Turk is reflected in the way he combats: the Turk takes off his armor whereas the Magyar and Slav do not duel unless they have their armor on. Here is how this contrast in the way these characters dress for combat is underlined in the song "Gjylqe Brahimi":

He sees the Turk red in blood,

He sees the Slav bloodless,

When he approached them,

The Slav had his armor on

The Turk didn't have his armor on. (Songs of the Frontier Warriors III 1993: 151)

The Turk character in the 'Songs of the Frontier Warriors' is liberal and noble even in the one-on-one combats he has with his enemy. In all of his duels, the Turk allows his

enemy to strike first whereas he always strikes second. Such a case is made evident in the song “The Seven Kings Complain in Istanbul”:

-Will you hit me turk or will I hit you?

He asked Sokol Haliti:

-As per our customs

you have to hit first

If God wants us to be saved

we will hit you second. (Songs of the Frontier Warriors III 1993: 251)

In some of the songs we also encounter female Turk characters. One such character is mentioned in the song called “Stavre Kapedon kidnaps Muj and Halili’s sister”:

-Oh Fatejme, Turk Fatejme, (Songs of the Frontier Warriors III 1993: 129)

Just like the men Turk characters mentioned above, female Turk characters are also positive ones, they are portrayed as being beautiful and women whom Slavs and Magyars lose their minds after. Here is how Fatime of Turkey is described in the song “Millor Grebeni surrounds Deli Rizvanolli”:

(...) Turk Fatime

No one compares to her. (Songs of the Frontier Warriors III 1993: 63)

Slavs and Magyars are Turks’ most fervent enemies, they do everything in their power to kill Turks, steal their properties, kidnap beautiful Turk women, etc. Slavs and Magyars, to reach their goal, often promise great rewards to those who kill Turks, they promise them lovers and other advantages. During our research on the ‘Songs of the Frontier Warriors’, we have come across such a phenomenon in a great number of songs. In the song “Gjergj Elez Alija wounds Senjane Ivan” the mother is the one pushing her son to kill some Turk:

As long as you kill one Turk,

Or capture one,

That is when you make your mother proud. (Songs of the Frontier Warriors III 1993: 23)

While in the song "Millor Grebeni surrounds Deli Rizvanolli" someone who kills a Turk is even promised one’s sister to his wife:

If one kills a Turk

My sister’s hand in marriage he can ask (Songs of the Frontier Warriors III 1993: 63)

3. The Turk as an ordinary Muslim

In the ‘Songs of the Frontier Warriors’, there are cases where Turks are portrayed leading normal, everyday lives with their families, and friends, during their religious practices, etc. In these cases, the Turk character was not used in contrast to the Slav and Magyar people but used to mark the Muslims of the Ottoman Empire, among whom were Albanians who are called in these cases the name Turk. As mentioned above, even in this case, the Turk name was not used to refer to Turk ethnicity, but to refer to the Muslim individual living within the borders of the Ottoman Empire. The Turk in such songs is one who fasts during the holy month of Ramadan and after that, celebrates Eid representing one of the most cliché settings in the ‘Songs of the Frontier Warriors’. Such a cliché is used as an opening line in the song “Muja Saves Tale”:

-For thirty days the Turk is fasting

On the thirtieth day, he celebrates Eid

(...)

Today is Eid oh Muje;

Where there are Turks there is Eid. (Songs of the Frontier Warriors III 1993: 48)

In such a sense, the name Turk is also noted in other songs. The Turk displaying similar characteristics is also found in the song “Bani Zadrali”:

He went to the barber

And shaved his head like a Turk,

He even dresses like a Turk (National Treasures II 1937: 124)

Conclusion

Turk as a character is often mentioned in Albanian epic songs known as ‘Songs of border warriors’. This character is an integral part of a large number of songs in which the Turkish character is the one who with his works builds the ideas of these songs, their motives, builds events and important artistic situations, etc., so in a large number songs, the Turkish character is one of the basic units. In the ‘Songs of the Frontier Warriors’, we find two different kinds of characters, those who invaded and destroyed and those who defended their lands from such invasions. The Turk character is a positive one. He is the main character of these songs, protecting himself and others as well as his lands from the invaders. The antagonists are the Slavs and Magyars who fight to invade lands and destroy anything that crosses their path etc. Hence, the ‘Songs of the Frontier Warriors’ have reserved a special place for the Turk character, wherever he goes, he is the hero of such songs, the epitome of what is good in an individual, the savior.

The Turk character does not display a static persona in the ‘Songs of the Frontier Warriors’. He is noted to engage himself in different social functions. In most cases, the Turk character in these songs implies and refers to the Muslim character especially when it comes to saving girls who are endangered by the Slavs or Magyars, an endeavor which leads him into different and dangerous adventures and as such makes these songs entertaining to its readers.

In these songs, Turk is a name used to refer to the Agallars of Jutbina including the protagonists Muja and Halili by using the name Turk instead of their first names. Nonetheless, there are cases where the Turk comes out and is mentioned as a separate character as well.

The character named Turk in the ‘Songs of the Frontier Warriors’ does not necessarily refer to the individual whose nationality is that of an ethnic Turk. In most cases, the Turk label itself refers to the Muslim individual living in the Ottoman Empire. If we analyze the circumstances in which these songs take place, the border separating the Muslims from the Slavs, the songs’ themes, etc., we come to the conclusion that in such songs, the term Turk refers to the Albanian Muslim individual. But, since the songs deal with an earlier period of time when the national separation between nations was yet to be highlighted, the character is referred to as a Turk instead of being referred to as an Albanian Muslim.

Nonetheless, the Turk character in the ‘Songs of the Frontier Warriors’ does not often refer to the Muslim individual himself but to all of the members of the Ottoman Empire regardless of their religious beliefs or nationality. Whether the name Turk refers to one or the other depends entirely on the context of the song in which the Turk character is mentioned therefore, each and every song longs for separate and detailed research of its own.

The Turk character, regardless of the shape and form he is mentioned in, still remains an important aspect of the ‘Songs of the Frontier Warriors’, therefore without fully understanding its character in terms of his role in the songs in hand it is impossible to grasp the nature of these songs, the timeframe in which the stories unfold, the Otto-

man Empire border and the Slavic and Magyar invasions from the north, etc. The Turk character is a specific one, giving meaning to most of the songs while being irreplaceable by other characters as replacing him with another character would result in adding to the ambiguity and uncertainty surrounding these songs.

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